

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE  
DEPARTMENT OF NAVY**

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT FOR PROPOSED MILITARY  
OPERATIONS AREAS IN EASTERN NORTH CAROLINA**

Per Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508) implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) the Department of the Navy gives notice that an Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required for the establishment of new special use airspace (SUA) in eastern North Carolina in the form of Military Operations Areas (MOAs). The proposed action is to create two functionally independent MOAs that will enhance existing and future training opportunities for the Second Marine Aircraft Wing (2d MAW) and other aircraft operating out of Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Cherry Point. The preferred alternative, and the one I have selected, is to establish the Core and Mattamuskeet MOAs.

The first of the proposed MOAs will provide a capability to conduct tactically realistic high-speed (sub-sonic) ingress (sea-to-land) and egress (land-to-sea) operations at altitudes above 3000 feet (ft) mean sea level (MSL). Only one alternative, referred to in the EA as the Core MOA, is available to meet this particular Marine Corps training need. The second proposed MOA will provide a capability to conduct essential sub-sonic aviation training activities that do not require restricted airspace but for safety reasons need to occur in a MOA. The alternatives evaluated in the EA, which meet this particular training need, are the Mattamuskeet and Cherry MOAs.

In addition to evaluating the alternatives individually, combinations of the alternatives are also analyzed in the EA. The combinations considered are the Core and Mattamuskeet MOAs and the Core and Cherry MOAs. The Core and Mattamuskeet MOA combination alternative is the preferred alternative. The Core MOA will overlie a portion of North Carolina's Core Banks (Carteret County), extending 35 nautical miles (NM) (65 kilometers [km]) along the Core Banks from about 8 miles northeast of the Cape Lookout lighthouse to about 1.25 miles (2 km) from the eastern end of Portsmouth Island. The MOA will also extend about 3 NM (6 km) to the southeast over the Atlantic Ocean. The Mattamuskeet MOA will overlie portions of North Carolina's Beaufort, Hyde, Pamlico, Tyrell, and Washington Counties, with approximate dimensions of 25 by 30 miles (46 by 56 km).

The MOAs will affect "boxes" of airspace between 3,000 ft (914 m) and 18,000 ft (5,486 m) MSL. These altitude restrictions will allow for minimal potential conflicts between non-participatory civil aircraft operations and military operations within the MOAs because civil aircraft operations will be able to continue to occur at all times below the floor of the MOA and above the ceiling without restriction. When in use by military aircraft, the MOAs will still be enterable by non-participatory aircraft when the pilot is (1) flying Instrument flight Rules (IFR) and IFR separation can be provided by MCAS Cherry Point Radar and Air Traffic Control Facility (otherwise, the pilot will be rerouted around the MOA); or (2) flying Visual Flight Rules and the pilot is using "see and avoid" techniques. No public airports are located within the land areas underlying either the Core or Mattamuskeet MOAs. Activities that may occur at private airstrips situated beneath the proposed MOAs will not be affected.

The following environmental resources/factors were analyzed in the EA:

- Noise – Operations with the MOAs will be subsonic. The Core MOA will receive an average of 6 sorties (of less than a minute each in duration) per day. The Mattamuskeet MOA will receive an average of 9.3 sorties per day (of approximately 45 minutes each). Approximately 65 percent of the sorties flown in the Core MOA will be at altitudes above 5,000 ft MSL, and about 75 percent of the sorties flown in the Mattamuskeet MOA would be above 10,000 ft MSL.

Assuming even distribution of flights throughout the MOAs any specific point on the ground underneath the MOAs could be exposed to single event noise levels in excess of 77 decibels, but not more than 96 decibels, for an average of 20 minutes per day (Mattamuskeet MOA) and approximately 2.3 minutes per day (Core MOA). Average day-night noise levels will be below 50 decibels.

- **Safety and Hazardous Materials Management** – Bird/aircraft strike hazards are a serious concern for military aircraft operations. In rare circumstances, aircraft may encounter birds at high altitudes. However, data from the US Air Force Aviation Safety Division indicates that bird/aircraft strike mishaps, for which altitude is known, occur predominately (98.4 percent of the time) below 3,000 ft.
- **Natural Resources** – The proposed action will increase the number of overflights, which may result in more frequent flushing of species that are sensitive to aircraft noise. Flushing due to overflights could result in decreased feeding time or an increase in energy expenditure that could contribute to the many causes of stress-induced mortality during migration. However, based on the nature of the proposed action, the available research, and comparisons to other areas of eastern North Carolina with heavy military overflight activity, we do not expect significant levels of these impacts to occur. The proposed action is not likely to adversely affect federally listed threatened or endangered species, and will have minimal potential to affect other wildlife species, water quality, or fish and wildlife habitat.
- **Cultural Resources** – Aircraft noise generated in the MOAs will not be sufficiently loud or of long enough duration to damage historic structures or affect the integrity of historic properties.
- **Socioeconomics and Community Facilities** – Impacts to socioeconomic resources will not be significant as the proposed action will not involve new permanent or temporary personnel, realignment or construction of facilities, nor any related shifts in spending, housing, or population distribution. Visitors to parks and wildlife refuges underneath the MOAs will be exposed to increased noise levels but only for short time periods. Flight paths within the MOAs will be random, so repeated overflights of any particular location within the lands underneath the MOAs is unlikely.
- **Land Use and Coastal Zone Management** – The proposed action will not alter existing facilities or require new development. The proposed action is fully consistent with the applicable enforceable coastal zone management policies of the state of North Carolina.
- **Air Quality** – All flight activities in the MOAs will occur above the Environmental Protection Agency defined mixing height for pollutants (3000 ft), which is the height above which all pollutants are dispersed in the atmosphere without reaching or affecting ground-level air quality conditions. Therefore, emissions released in the MOA will have no measurable ground-level effects.

The EA also analyzed the potential for cumulative effects, which are impacts on the environment that result from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (federal or non-federal) or person undertakes such other actions. The cumulative impacts analysis in the EA included the following four actions: introduction of the F/A-18 E/F aircraft to the US Atlantic Fleet, retirement of F-14 aircraft, development of a new Department of the Navy Outlying Landing Field (OLF), and initial F-22 operational wing bed-down. On September 3, 2003 the Navy announced its decision to homebase 8 fleet squadrons (96 aircraft) and the Fleet Replacement Squadron (FRS) (24 aircraft) at Naval Air Station (NAS) Oceana, Virginia, and 2 fleet squadrons (24 aircraft) at Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Cherry Point, North Carolina, and to construct an outlying landing field (OLF) in Washington County, North Carolina. The combination of the Core and Mattamuskeet MOAs and development of the Washington County OLF will not result in cumulative noise impacts because the noise contours of the OLF site fall outside the MOA boundaries. Implementation of the Navy's decision will result in an overall increase in usage of the MOAs. The EA accounted for this information when average sorties were calculated for each MOA and

determined that average day-night noise levels will remain below 50 decibels. Cumulative impacts on airspace usage will be minor as non-participatory general aviation aircraft will be able to safely transit below the 3000 ft floor of the MOA at all times and within the MOA as described earlier, and through the airspace surrounding the OLF airfield at an altitude at or below 2500 feet above ground level after obtaining clearance through the OLF control tower. The decommissioning of F-14 squadrons is anticipated to be complete by fiscal year 2010. Finally, no cumulative impacts would arise from the F-22 Operational Wing Bed-down as these aircraft are not likely users of the MCAS Cherry Point MOAs and will only be occasional users of other NC (US Air Force controlled) airspace.

Establishment of the Core and Mattamuskeet MOAs will not result in significant impacts with regard to any of the issues investigated in the EA. For this reason, no environmental impact statement needs to be prepared. This decision will be implemented, i.e. the MOAs established, through approval and review processes of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). The FAA considers MOA proposals non-rulemaking and outlines specific processing criteria in FAA Order 7400.2. The Marine Corps will submit a proposal package (including this EA) to the FAA Atlanta regional office for review of content and compliance with FAA regulations for oversight and approval of airspace. Per FAA Order 7400.2 the FAA will coordinate with potentially affected airports and air traffic control facilities, other FAA offices and adjacent regional FAA air traffic divisions. FAA will provide for a 45-day public comment period, and will review comments received and the results of coordination as described above. Upon successful completion of this process the Atlanta FAA regional office will forward the proposal to FAA headquarters for review, final determination and processing. MOA approval will be published in the National Flight Data Digest (NFDD) on or before the applicable charting cutoff date.

The proposed action will comply with existing federal regulations and with state, regional, and local policies and programs. The proposed action will be in compliance with all federal acts, executive orders, and policies. The EA prepared to address this action may be obtained from: Commanding General, Attn: Public Affairs Officer, Building 198, Marine Corps Air Station, Cherry Point, North Carolina 28533 telephone (252) 466- 4241.

10 Dec 03

Date



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